NO PLAYS EXCHANGED

BUGBEE'S POPULAR PLAYS

Christmas Eve at the Poor Farm

By

LENA PRATHER MARTIN

PRICE 25 CENTS

THE WILLIS N. BUGBEE CO.
CUSE, N. Y.

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THE WILLIS N. BUGBEE CO., SYRACUSE, N. Y.

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Christmas Eve at the Poor Farm

A ONE ACT PLAY

— *By* —
LENA PRATHER MARTIN
Author of "Thoughtless Giving."

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THE WILLIS N. BUGBEE CO.
SYRACUSE, N. Y.

Christmas Eve at the Poor Farm

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MRS. LANGDON, *Keeper of the Poor Farm.*
MISS JAMES .. } *Two members of the Choral Club.*
MISS WATSON }
MRS. SHAW }
MRS. CLEMENS }
MRS. WITCHER } *Inmates.*
MRS. WILLIAMS }

MRS. SHAW'S GRANDDAUGHTER

PROPERTIES: *Furniture for a very plain living room.*

TIME OF PRESENTATION: *Thirty minutes.*

Christmas Eve at the Poor Farm

SCENE: *A living room at the Poor Farm.* MRS. SHAW *is discovered reading the Bible;* MRS. CLEMENS, *knitting;* MRS. WITCHER, *leaning on cane;* MRS. WILLIAM, *smoking pipe. All are seated.*

MRS. WITCHER (*drawing shawl closer around her shoulders*). Hit seems like they air a-trying to friz us out. The county pays fer all the coal we burn, an' I am jest a-going to tell Miss Langdon that I don't perpose ter friz.

MRS. CLEMENS. Don't seem so cold to me. Mrs. Langdon said you wouldn't be satisfied if you wuz in heaven.

MRS. WITCHER. How kin *she* tell? She ain't never saw me any place but right here, and I am mighty sartin *this place* ain't no heaven.

MRS. WILLIAMS (*removing pipe*). Maybe this place ain't heaven, but hit do seem mighty good to me when I think about being all alone by myself, away up thar in the mountains in that cabin. When that thar preacher found me I hadn't et anything fer a week. I tell you plenty to eat, a good fire and warm clothes seems like heaven to me, but I must say I ain't seen no angels around here, lest it be Mrs. Shaw. (*Puts pipe back in mouth.*)

MRS. SHAW (*laying down the Bible she has been reading*). I am afraid I am far from being an angel, but the Lord sent my afflictions on me to draw me nearer to him, and I try to bear my troubles without complaining and to make life easier for others.

MRS. WITCHER. I wish you would do somethin' to make it easier fer me. I've got rheumatism in my hands, corns on my feet, lumbago in my back (*gets up and walks around on a cane*), a dizziness in my head, an ache in my ears, a pain in my stomach, the phthisc in my side, and hit do 'pear like my heart stops beating altogether at times; an' I ain't gitting no better. Ef the county doctor was any good he would at least give me a plaster fer my back, some calomel fer my dizziness, an' some sort of spirits for my heart.

(*Enter* MRS. LANGDON, *carrying a large pan of popped corn.*)

MRS. LANGDON. I know you all want to help me get ready for Christmas. Here is some corn I want strung on these threads. I want to put it on the Christmas tree.

MRS. WILLIAMS (*taking pipe out of her mouth*). Air we going to have a Christmas tree?

MRS. LANGDON. Yes, and there will be a nice present on it for each of you. (*Sets pan on the floor, and hands needles and thread to* MRS. SHAW.) Mrs. Shaw, please distribute these needles, and I wish all of you would string the corn as soon as possible. I shall be back directly. (*Exit* MRS. LANGDON.)

(MRS. SHAW *distributes the needles and thread.*)

MRS. WITCHER (*taking needle.*) I can't use a needle, I've got rheumatiz in my hands so bad I can't use my fingers at all. (*Reaches into pan and takes handful of corn and puts it into her mouth.*) This pain in my stomach hurts a sight, too. (*Puts more corn into mouth.*) My teeth air bad an' I can't do much good chewing, either. (*Puts another handful of corn into mouth.*)

MRS. CLEMENS. Peers to me you air making pretty good out of it havin' sech bad teeth. I've got no teeth at all much; an' of course they would ask me to string popcorn. Last spring when they wuz putting up strawberries they didn't ask me to help at all and I kin eat strawberries first straight.

(*All start stringing popcorn.* MRS. WITCHER *eats twice as much as she puts on her string.*)

MRS. WITCHER. Precious few of them preserves I've ever seen. I don't think this Christmas tree business is going to amount to much, either. It is just an excuse to make us work.

MRS. SHAW. I don't call this work. I am only too glad to do it. It reminds me of the time when my children were small. Oh, those were happy, happy times, especially at Christmas! The greatest pleasure of my life is to live over those times in my mind.

MRS. WILLIAMS (*removing pipe*). I ain't got no times worth living over. All I ever knowed was jest *work, work.* I am havin' the best time I ever had right here in this pore house. I tell you this place is good enough for me.

MRS. WITCHER. Hit ain't good enough for me, an' I wouldn't a-bin here ef my sons had had eny gumption

about gitting married. Hit looks like when they wus a picking their wives they tuck the two meanest women the Almighty ever made. John's wife wouldn't have me because I et my victuals with a knife and smoked a pipe. Dick's wife had a whole parcel of children, and she thought I ought to help take care of them, but she wouldn't do one thing the way I wanted it done. So we fit back and forth considerable until one day Dicky brought me here and said he couldn't keep me any longer. So here I be and I suppose here I'll stay until I die. (*She has a few grains of corn on her string and begins to eat it off.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. An' I don't care ef I do stay here. Hit shore beats whar I used ter live all holler.

MRS. CLEMENS. Yes, jest so you have a pipe, you air all right; but I don't like things so peaceful. I like ter have things a-goin' on.

(*Enter* MRS. LANGDON. MRS. WITCHER *rises, drops her string of popcorn on her chair and lets her shawl fall over it.*)

MRS. LANGDON (*picking up popcorn pan*). You have gotten through in a hurry. Put your strings of corn into this pan. (*All put in their strings until she comes to* MRS. WITCHER.) Where is your string, Mrs. Witcher?

MRS. WITCHER (*looking around for her string*). Whar is my string, sure enough? Hit air gone.

MRS. SHAW. Why, you had it just a minute ago.

MRS. WITCHER (*getting up and walking around excitedly, wringing her hands. Forgets all about her rheumatism*). I feel the needle right now sticking into my inards. Send fur the doctor quick. I can't stand it another minit.

MRS. LANGDON. I will get you some epsom salts. (*Goes out.*)

MRS. WITCHER. Git hit quick. Fan me, fan me. I think the needle is sticking into my heart.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Maybe hit is the corn you et. I saw a cow oncet that et too much corn, and she swelled up and busted.

(*Enter* MRS. LANGDON. *Has glass with salts in it.*)

MRS. LANGDON. Here are the epsom salts.

MRS. WITCHER. I don't want ter take no salts an' I ain't goin' to.

MRS. LANGDON. Yes you are. We don't want you to die.

MRS. CLEMENS Of course we don't. Hit would interfere with our Christmas.

MRS. LANGDON. If you don't take these salts you can't have a bite of the Christmas turkey. (*Puts glass to* MRS. WITCHER'S *mouth.*)

MRS. SHAW. Take it like a good girl.

MRS. CLEMENS (*aside to* MRS. SHAW). Keep still and maybe we will get her share of the turkey.

MRS. WITCHER. Indeed you don't. (*Swallows the salts.*)

(*A knock at door.*)

MRS. LANGDON. Come in.

(*Enter* MISS JAMES *and* MISS WATSON.)

MISS JAMES. We hope we are not intruding, but we came to see if you would like for our Choral Club to sing some Christmas Carols for you.

MRS. LANGDON. Yes, indeed, I am sure all of the inmates would be only too glad to hear you sing.

MRS. CLEMENS. Kin you sing funeral songs?

MISS WATSON. Why, I hope we will have no occasion to sing them.

MRS. CLEMENS. But I 'spect you will, fer Miss Witcher has done gone and swallered her string uv popcorn, needle an' all.

MISS WATSON. I hope not. Maybe there has been some mistake.

(MRS. WITCHER *moans and groans.*)

MRS. CLEMENS. No, thar ain't. I saw her eating the corn one minit, and the next, string, needle, corn and all had disappeareed.

(MRS. WITCHER *groans louder,* MRS. SHAW *and* MRS. LANGDON *fan her.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. Let her set down. People can't die very well a-standing up.

(MRS. WITCHER *plumps herself down on her shawl, but gets up quickly.*)

MRS. WITCHER. There is something in that chair that stings.

MRS. CLEMENS. I bet hit air a snake. (*Picks up the shawl very carefully to see what is under it.* MRS. WILLIAMS *pounces upon the string of popcorn.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. Here is your string of popcorn and the needle. Mrs. Clemens never saw you swaller hit a tall.

MRS. WITCHER (*turning angrily to* MRS. CLEMENS). What did you mean by telling me I swallowed that needle, and causing me to have to take salts? Miss Langdon, you ought to give me her part of the Christmas turkey tomorrow fer telling a story.

MRS. CLEMENS. Ef you didn't swallow hit, how could hit uv stuck in your inards?

MRS. LANGDON. Let's not quarrel. All is well that ends well. (*Takes string of corn from* MRS. WILLIAMS.) Mrs. Witcher, you did not hurt yourself stringing corn. Your string isn't half as full as the others.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Hit be her that is full of corn sted uv the string.

MRS. WITCHER. Ever'body is agin me. I ain't got a friend in the world. I reckon the county pays fur the corn, and I've got a right to eat hit. Goodness knows with heart trouble, rheumatism, phthisic, neuralgia and indigestion I ought to be allowed ter eat whatever I want. (*Hobbles out of room on her cane.*)

MRS. LANGDON. Mrs. Clemens, please take this pan out and don't say anything else to Mrs. Witcher. You did very wrong to tell her you saw her swallow the needle, when you did not.

MRS. CLEMENS (*stands up knitting*). I ain't so sure I didn't see her swaller hit. Maybe she be a sleight-of-hand performer.

MRS. LANGDON. We need no explanations. Take this pan and the corn out to the room where the tree is.

(*Exit* MRS. CLEMENS.)

MRS. WILLIAMS. I never decorated no Christmas tree in my life. Kin I put the corn on the tree?

MRS. LANGDON. Yes, come and we will go decorate it. Miss James, won't you and Miss Watson go with us?

MISS JAMES. No, thank you. We will go after the other singers.

(*Exit* MRS. WILLIAMS, MISS WATSON *and* MISS JAMES.

MRS. LANGDON *looks back when she reaches the door and sees that* MRS. SHAW *is not coming.*)

MRS. LANGDON. Aren't you coming, too, Mrs. Shaw?

MRS. SHAW. I beg of you to let me stay here by myself.

MRS. LANGDON. All right, though I know you would feel better to go.

(*Exit* MRS. LANGDON.)

MRS. SHAW. Alone with my thoughts at last. Christmas Eve at the Poor Farm. Never did I even dream it would come to this. Oh, for the quiet and refinement of my old home, and what wouldn't I give to spend one more Christmas within its dear old walls! But what is the use of repining? I will try to be grateful for the many happy days I have had. But it was so hard to lose my only son on the battlefield so soon after my only daughter and her husband and child were assassinated by the Turks. Just to think, I never got to see my darling little granddaughter.

(*Enter* MRS. CLEMENS *and the others.*)

MRS. CLEMENS (*excitedly*). Here come the singers.

(*Enter the singers, who take their places.*)

MRS. LANGDON. I will go tell the other inmates to leave their doors open so they can hear the music. So many of them are bed-fast and they will be so happy if you will stop at their doors and speak to them before you leave.

(*Exit* MRS. LANGDON.....*The singers sing, and the inmates applaud.* MRS. LANGDON *returns during the first song.*)

MRS. LANGDON. In behalf of the inmates I want to thank you singers for putting a little cheer into their lives. We are going to take gifts off from the tree now. Won't you come and help us distribute them? (*All start off the stage but* MRS. SHAW.) Mrs. Shaw, aren't you coming, too?

MRS. SHAW. I hope you will excuse me. Christmas is such a sad time with me that I am afraid I had better stay alone with my thoughts. (*Exit all but* MRS. SHAW.) My heart lies in Flanders Field with my boy and in Turkey with my missionary daughter and her family. Truly, I have been afflicted to lose two such precious children. If my granddaughter could only have been spared it would not be quite so bad. (*A pause. Soft music if desired.*)

(*Enter* MRS. WITCHER *with two packages.*)

MRS. WITCHER. I have brought your package to you. See what it is. Here is mine. (*Shows a box of candy.*) It's chocolate. Of course they would give me what I can't eat. I can't bear chocolate. Let's see what you've got. (MRS. SHAW *unwraps a cap with two pretty bows on it.*) I'd lots rather have that than chocolate candy, let's trade. (*Hands* MRS. SHAW *the box of candy and puts cap on her own head.*) Let me look at them chocolates. (*Puts one into her mouth*). They taste better than what I thought they did. I know you won't mind my taking some. (*Takes several and ties them up in her handkerchief.*)

(*Enter* MRS. WILLIAMS.)

MRS. WILLIAMS (*displaying a pipe*). See my new pipe. I allus did want a pipe like this.

(*Enter* MRS. CLEMENS.)

MRS. CLEMENS. I have got a pretty new apron, but hit hain't got no pockets on hit. (*Puts new apron on over the old one she has on.*) I wonder, Miss Shaw, ef you can't make me two pockets fer hit?

MRS. SHAW. Yes, if Mrs. Langdon will find me the goods. Won't all of you have some of my candy? (*Passes candy around.*)

(*All take some candy and empty the box.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. You haven't any left fur yourself. (*Puts one of her pieces into the box.*)

MRS. CLEMENS. Here is one of mine. (*Puts a piece into box.*)

MRS. WITCHER. Here is one of mine. I don't like chocolate nohow. (*Puts a piece into box and one into her mouth.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS (*holding up pipe*). This air the first Christmas present I ever got in my life. Your apron is pretty, Miss Clemens, and so is your cap, Miss Witcher. What did you git, Miss Shaw?

MRS. SHAW (*sadly*). Three pieces of chocolate candy.

MRS. CLEMENS. I am glad I got a apron, so Miss Witcher can't et hit up.

MRS. WITCHER (*angrily*). I guess you et her candy, too.

MRS. SHAW. Don't quarrel about me. If I had ever

so much, it would seem small in comparison to what I used to have.

(*Enter* MRS. LANGDON.)

MRS. LANGDON. Mrs. Shaw, I have another present for you. It is something I know you would rather have than anything else in the world. I want you to prepare yourself to receive it.

MRS. WITCHER. Ef she don't want all of hit she can divide with the rest of us. What do you suppose it can be, Mrs. Shaw?

(*Enter* MISS JAMES.)

MISS JAMES (*goes up to* MRS. SHAW). It is the nicest present in all the world. Do you think you could stand to have it brought in now?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Of course she kin. I am about to bust with curiosity myself. I know she can't wait another minit. At least tell her what hit air.

MRS. SHAW. Surely I, who have endured so much sorrow, can stand a little joy.

(*Enter* MISS WATSON *and a young woman.*)

MISS WATSON (*leads young woman up to* MRS. SHAW). Mrs. Shaw, this is the best present I could find for you. This is the granddaughter you have mourned so long as dead.

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes, Grandmother, I am the daughter of your daughter Alice. So often, before that dreadful day, she used to tell me about you.

MRS. SHAW (*taking young girl's hand*). I know you are Alice's daughter, my dear. You look exactly like her. I feel as if she had come back to me. Truly God has been good. But tell me how it happens you are alive. I was told you were dead.

YOUNG WOMAN. Mother and Father were killed in that dreadful massacre and I was left for dead. The Red Cross found me and saw that I was still alive. They took me to a hospital where I stayed a long time, almost bereft of my reason. When I was better, the Red Cross put me in a college where I stayed until I married a wealthy American who brought me to this country. The first thing that I did when I came to America was to try to locate my mother's people. I had forgotten the name of the place where she said you lived. It was an uphill job, but finally I discovered the place and found that Uncle had died in battle, and that you had been sent here.

MRS. SHAW (*draws granddaughter to her*). Oh, my dear! my dear! I am ready now to enter the better world.

YOUNG WOMAN. Don't talk about leaving me, now that I have found you. My husband has bought the old homestead and you and I are going to spend many happy years there, I hope.

MRS. SHAW. Not *many* more, but Oh! I shall be so glad to spend my few remaining years within the sacred walls of my old home, and with my own flesh and blood.

MRS. CLEMENS. But what air we all goin' ter do without Miss Shaw? She air allus a smoothing things over, and keeping us from fighting among ourselves.

MRS. WITCHER. She jest can't go. That's all thar is to that. We can't spare her.

MRS. SHAW. I hate to leave you, but I can't ask for a greater blessing than to live with my daughter's child in my old home. Whenever you get to quarreling, think of me and how badly I should feel, if I knew it. You must never forget me.

MRS. WILLIAM. Hit ain't our fergettin' you, hit is your fergittin' us, an' I am goin' ter give you this old pipe uv mine to remember me by. Hit air a pity you don't smoke, but put hit up some place in your old home whar you can see it, and remember how many good smokes I have had out uv it.

MRS. CLEMENS (*taking off old apron*). And here is this old apron of mine. Take hit to remember me by, fer I have a new one now, ef hit ain't got no pockets on hit. (*Gives apron to* MRS. SHAW.)

MRS. WITCHER (*starts to hand her the cap, but takes it back and hands her one of the bows off of it*). Here is a ribbon bow to remember me by. Keep hit whar you kin see it, and allus remember I am a wearing a cap with only one bow on hit; because I liked you so much, I gave you the tother one.

MRS. SHAW. I need no gifts to make me remember you, but I accept them in the spirit in which they are given, and I hope you who remain here will be as happy and contented as possible. I know Mrs. Langdon will be good and kind to you, and I hope you will try in every way to please her. (MISS JAMES, MISS WATSON *and* MRS. SHAW *leaning on the arm of her granddaughter, start toward the door. The inmates put handkerchiefs to their eyes.*) Good-bye, and may everybody have a happy Christmas.

CURTAIN.

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Tom Thumb Circus. A dandy little entertainment for the very little people. Introduces the principal features of a circus. Any number of characters. 25 cents.

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Aunt Sophronia at College. College comedy in 3 acts, by Willis N. Bugbee. One of the best short plays we have ever offered. Full of fun from start to finish. 5m., 7f. Time, 1¼ hours. 25 cents.

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Selina Lou Celebrates (Lucile Crites). 1 f. Although never married Selina Lou holds a silver anniversary just the same. After looking around at the husbands of some of her friends she concludes she has more right to celebrate than most of them. Comical. Contains also "About Dogs." 25 cents.

Mrs. Murphy's Contribution (Elizabeth W. Gwynne). Irish character monologue for 1 f. Mrs. Murphy relates to Mrs. Clancy her experiences with a collector of funds for a drunkards' home. Contains also "Hash." This latter encore is a takeoff on the restaurant waitress. 25 cents.

After Effects (Irene Carman McMurtrey). 1 f. Mrs. Jones relates her experiences in the hospital where she was operated on for "belerium." Contains also "Five or Six Hundred." 25 cents.

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Dark Side of Life, The (Myrtle Giard Elsey). Monologue for boy. He would rather play ball than listen to the preacher, but made the mistake of playing too near the church during services. Very funny. 25 cents.

Romance and Kid Brother (Myrtle Giard Elsey). Monologue for boy, or boy impersonation. George "listens in" while sister has her beau. One of the funniest monologues we have. Book also contains short encore "Sellin' Drugs." 25 cents.

Sewing Out By the Day (Nancy D. Dunlea). 1 f. Dressmaker, while sewing for a customer, gossips about other ladies for whom she has worked. 25 cents.

Mandy Entertains the New Preacher (Lucile Crites). 1 f. Mandy seizes the opportunity to tell the new preacher some astonishing facts about the members of the congregation. She is also looking out for her daughter, Mary Jane. Very funny. Contains also "Mandy Reads the Newspaper." 25 cents.

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Bachelor Girl Calls on Mother of Two, A (Lucile Crites). 1 f. The visit is carried on under difficulties owing to the interruptions by the "two." Contains also "Fresh Air Fiends." 25 cents.

Fresh Air Fiends (Lucile Crites). Negro character monologue for 1 f. Mandy nearly freezes to death at the Ladies' Aid Meetin'. Contains also "A Bachelor Girl Calls on Mother of Two." 25 cents.

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